MELIORISM IN THOMAS HARDY'S NOVELS

by

CONNIE STERLING STAMETS

B. A., Kansas State University, 1966

A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1968

Approved by:

Earle Davis

Major Professor

Meliorism in Thomas Hardy's Novels

Spanning the years from 1840 to 1928, Thomas Hardy's life coincides with an age characterized by transition; it is a disturbing time in which very little remains stable. From the vantage point of his childhood home in Upper Bockhampton, in the parish of Stinsford, Dorset, he could see the gradual disintegration of old rural England and the insurgence of problems created by industrial, urban developments. He could see many of his countrymen being uprooted from their homes and sympathized with their pathetic situation, as reflected in the Derbyfields' displacement in his novel Tess of the d'Urbervilles. Because of a growing insecurity in the rural scene, the general migration of laborers to the towns was usually by choice;[1] but Hardy's eye did not fail to note that the transient rural laborers who remained did not maintain even the horticulture formerly established by permanent dwellers.[2]

The coming of the railway brought mobility to the outlying areas, but it was also the means of destroying certain folk customs, such as the singing of old traditional ballads. According to Hardy's wife, "The orally transmitted ditties of centuries /were/ slain by the London songs that were introduced."[3] Fast disappearing were age-old crafts, recreations and religious practices like home-to-home Christmas eve visits by Hardy's local church choir once lead by the author's grandfather. Aesthetically Hardy had to defend the countryside against the encroaching insipid existence of the outside world, but he could not be deluded about the outcome. "He knew that a way of life was vanishing in his time, and on the whole, as a 'meliorist,' he was on the side of the steam engine."[4]

In the speculative realm there is a similar break with the past, and it is no less difficult to face the new truths. Until Hardy's tenth year William

Wordsworth, the harbinger and then apostate of romanticism, was the poet laureate of England. Yet the dictates about Nature of his early career seem curiously naive when viewed in the light of a work published when Hardy was nineteen, Charles Darwin's Origin of Species. It is no longer easy to say as Wordsworth did in "The Tables Turned" "Sweet is the lore which Nature brings," for Nature comes to be viewed as an indifferent force to which earth's creatures must adapt if they are to survive.

One of Hardy's earliest recollections of his childhood shows that his sensitivity toward the pain involved in the continuation of life was aroused early. 'Being in the garden at Bockhampton with his father on a bitterly cold winter day, they noticed a fieldfare, half-frozen, and the father took up a stone idly and threw it at the bird, possibly not meaning to hit it. The fieldfare fell dead, and the child Thomas picked it up and it was as light as a feather, all skin and bone, practically starved. He said he had never forgotten how the body of the fieldfare felt in his hand: the memory had always haunted him."[5] Another time in his childhood his father and he were coming home at three in the morning from a party for which the two had provided violin entertainment.

> It was bitterly cold, and the moon glistened bright upon the encrusted snow, amid which they saw motionless in the hedge what appeared to be a white human figure without a head. The boy, being very tired, with finger-tips tingling from pressing the strings, was for passing the ghastly sight quickly, but the elder went up to the object, which proved to be a very tall thin man in a long white smock-frock, leaning against the bank in a drunken stupor, his head hanging forward so low that at a distance he had seemed to have no head at all. Hardy senior, seeing the danger of leaving the man where he might be frozen to death, awoke him after much exertion, and they supported him to a cottage near, where he lived, and pushed him in through the door, their ears greeted as they left with a stream of abuse from the man's wife, which was also vented upon her unfortunate husband, whom she promptly knocked down. Hardy's father remarked that it might have been as well to leave him where he was, to take his chance of being frozen to death.[6]

The bird's grasp on life, made faltering by inclement elements, was dislodged by one capricious act of a human; the brow-beaten husband's life might just as well have been ended since his existence seems to have been too hard to endure. No doubt Hardy's "twilight view of life," as George Meredith referred to his personal philosophy was formulated early. Through his reading and his observations in rural Dorset, Hardy could not help being deeply and lastingly impressed by the cruelty so often present in life.

It is this world he knew as a child that becomes the setting for his novels, with the single exception of The Hand of Ethelberta, which is set in a metropolitan scene. His home county of Dorset is lumped together with others in the Southwest, and the resultant district takes on the early English name, Wessex. In the preface to Far From the Madding Crowd Hardy notes with delight his readers' willingness to accept "a Wessex population living under Queen Victoria;--a modern Wessex of railways, the penny post, mowing and reaping machines, union workhouses, lucifer matches, labourers who read and write, and National school children." His own knowledge of this area is readily evident in his novels, but it should be understood, from the beginning, that he "was not the historian of Dorset but the novelist and poet of Wessex. He was a realist within a world which he had reshaped to his vision."[7]

The peasants who populate this Wessex "furnish the rich subsoil of custom and belief in which the main action is rooted."[8] No doubt many acquaintances Hardy made as a child attending the local church and schools and fiddling at village gatherings, and later as an apprentice to a Dorchester architect, and finally as an architect in London furnished the prototypes for the rustics of his novels. They are a more or less constant factor, rooted in their environment, and they rather passively accept what life has to offer.

They have been categorically called "innocents" endowed with the "great Wessex virtues /of/ fidelity, simplicity, endurance, and tolerance,"[9] but their effect is not always so submissive or so lacking in guile as this description might imply. The Mixen Lane patrons in The Mayor of Casterbridge organize a skimmity-ride in order to expose cruelly the former affection between Lucetta Farfrae and Michael Henchard. In The Return of the Native Christian Candle thwarts any possibility of reconciliation between Clym Yeobright and his mother when he foolishly gambles away the money Mrs. Yeobright had sent him to give her son. An even more reprehensible action occurs in Tess of the d'Urbervilles when the Derbyfields irrevocably spoil their innocent daughter's chances of ever having a normal life by packing her off to claim kin in the hopes of adding to the family's coffers. The townsmen and the country yokels do act individually and their actions are an integral, organic part of the novels. They are not just a kind of background music for the main characters to dominate.

It has often been noticed that Hardy's rustics bear a certain affinity to those used in Shakespeare's plays. Both writers use "similar types, combining humor, shrewdness, simplicity, and pathos."[10] They provide a fairly fixed level of existence which allows the reader to gauge the heights and depths the main characters rise and fall. As a chorus they traditionally act as a "symbol of the great majority of humdrum mortals who go on living through their uneventful day, whatever catastrophes may overtake the finer spirits placed among them."[11]

And now we come to those characters on whom Hardy expends the most interest and space. Almost without fail his main characters are caught in a set of circumstances which threaten or extinguish any hope of their realizing their life's ambitions. They are not persons who are widely success-

ful in political, financial, or social terms, but they are beyond the average and choose to direct their lives along paths that may involve rejecting their environments and ready-made destinies. In this sense, one may agree with D. H. Lawrence that they are "aristocrats."[12] Hardy has immense compassion for them, but he recognizes that life and human nature are not likely to bend to their wishes.

Eustacia Vye in The Return of the Native must live on the seemingly infinite, barren expanse of Egdon Heath, away from the gay sunny afternoons of bands and officers and gallants of her native Budmouth. For her the only relief from the intolerable loneliness is a grand and passionate love. She feels that a "blaze of love, and extinction, /would/ be better than a lantern glimmer of the same which should last long years."[13] But because there is quite understandably no such thing available to her on the Heath, Eustacia settles for Damon Wildeve, knowing, of course, that if a greater and therefore more appropriate man does appear, Wildeve will be quickly left behind. With the advent of the Egdon native, Clym Yeobright, she feels her prayers have been answered. The two become lovers and marry, but Clym is adamant in his refusal to return to his business in Paris and fully intends to spend the rest of his life teaching the peasants of Egdon Heath. Thus what Eustacia had envisioned as an open door to freedom closes and locks her forever in the world she hates. Though she is ruthless, one must regret that a woman with her grandiose temperament should have to endure the solemn isolation of Egdon.

Clym's predicament seems just as pathetic. From early childhood his life held great promise. People expected "he would be successful in an original way, or that he would go to the dogs in an original way . . . . The only absolute certainty about him was that he would not stand still in the

circumstances in which he had been born."[14] This faith seemed well placed, for Clym had indeed done well as a diamond merchant in Paris. But he found this occupation could not sustain him, and so he returned to the Heath which so completely informed his being. His studies had acquainted him with ethical systems popular in his time which he hoped to impart to the simple Egdon dwellers. Though vague, it is a simple wish really, and yet it becomes next to impossible with his wife and mother so violently opposed to his intention and to each other. Near-blindness complicates matters even more, as do the unnecessary death of his mother, his wife's estrangement, and finally her death. At book's end, Clym is reduced to "an itinerant open-air preacher and lecturer on morally unimpeachable subjects." By now he has "left alone creeds and systems of philosophy, finding enough and more than enough to occupy his tongue in the opinions and actions common to all good men."

Tess Derbyfield and Angel Clare are another couple whose love seems as star-crossed as the Yeobrights'. Both are attempting to make a break with the past by coming to Dairyman Crick's farm in the Froom valley. Tess had given birth to an illegitimate child after being possessed by a man whom she despised, and the hard work as a dairymaid offered her the hope of expiation for her former "sin." Angel had renounced his father's and two brothers' vocation in the church, contending he could not take Holy Orders so long as the Church refused to "liberate her mind from an untenable redemptive theolatry."[15] He came to Talbothays Dairy as a six months' pupil to learn the dairyman's angle of farming, having already made the rounds of the other types of farms. His eventual goal was to set up a farm of his own either in England or the colonies.

In the lush, verdant surroundings of the dairy, their love for each other is born. Tess resists because she thinks her earlier transgression

makes her unfit for any man. Angel is most persuasive, however, and she finally consents to marriage. Wanting him to know of her past, she slips a letter under Angel's door telling all; but the letter is never received by Angel. They marry, and on their wedding night after hearing her husband confess to a night of debauchery in his youth, Tess is no longer afraid to confront Angel with her confession. As might be predicted, Angel turns on her; he had fallen in love with a grand illusion he had created so much so that "she was another woman than the one who had excited his desire."[16] Angel goes off to Brazil leaving Tess to cruelly hard work still necessary to support her family and the continued advances of Alec Stoke-d'Urberville, the father of her dead child. Reconciliation is not possible until Angel, finally realizing his error, returns and Tess has ridded her life forever of Alec by murdering him.

The only couple that has any hope of a happy future appears in a novel which predates both of the above, Far From the Madding Crowd. Their eventual union is possible, though, only because Gabriel Oak has the qualities his name implies, mainly steadfast endurance. From the first pages of the book Gabriel is in love with Bathsheba Everdene. His affections openly rebuffed, he must bear the shame of not only being unable to support a wife but also becoming his love's servant; he must tolerate Bathsheba's unthinking action of sending Farmer Boldwood a valentine and thereby awakening his unwanted love toward her; and finally he must watch her marry the shallow, fickle spendthrift, Sergeant Troy. He watches her suffer after Troy leaves her and after he is later murdered by Boldwood. After all this, Bathsheba and Gabriel do share their love and marry.

Even these brief summaries of Hardy's novels are sufficient to see the drift of the author's thought. Either by their own actions or by circum-

stance, his protagonists are made to suffer hugely. Why? Who or what is to blame for their suffering? Why do chance and coincidence play such a large role in the ordering of their lives? Why does love and frequently marriage bring only pain? And finally why are Hardy's characters so ineffectual? Their attempts to improve their condition seem as futile as Tess holding her hand on the gaping wound of her dying horse. Pulling her unlighted wagon early one morning on the way to market, it was run into by the mailcart. "In her despair Tess sprang forward and put her hand upon the hole, with the only result that she became splashed from face to skirt with the crimson drops."[17] Where is that beam of meliorism to come from if we are indeed to believe Hardy that things will get better?

That question furnishes in part the answer, or at least it suggests a modus operandi: "If way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst." What is there about man and his universe which Hardy finds regrettable and immutable? Certainly one of his statements on this subject worthy of consideration is found in a poem he wrote as a young man of twenty-six. "Hap" antedates the earliest novel considered in this study by eight years, but in the light of all his novels and his later poetry, there is little reason to believe it is not a valid representation of the man's thinking throughout his career.

> How arrives it joy lies slain,
> And why unblooms the best hope ever sown?
> __Crass Casualty obstructs the sun and rain,
> And dicing time for gladness casts a moan...
> These purblind Doomsters had as readily strown
> Blisses about my pilgrimage as pain.

Hardy's gods--Doomsters--are blind; they have no feelings at all about man; they are totally indifferent to him. There is no benign God sitting in His heaven decreeing punishment for the wicked and rewards for the good. Hardy

does not give his characters the satisfaction of thinking, as Job does, that a better world awaits man, thus minimizing the pain of this existence. Nor does he allow humans the dignity of knowing they contend against fate which is cruelly dictated by a malevolent being. Yet in terms of Darwinian thought, this view makes sense. "Since the law of natural selection depends upon accidental variation to make the fittest survive, it would seem altogether likely that a kind of 'lawless caprice' did govern human fortunes."[18]

In ascribing Eustacia god-like powers, Hardy says there would probably be little difference in the government of the world if she were to take over the job of the Fates. "There would have been the same inequality of lot, the same heaping up of favours here, or contumely there, the same generosity before justice, the same perpetual dilemmas, the same captious alternation of caresses and blows that we endure now."[19] Realistically then, one must realize that man's happiness or unhappiness, his success or failure is quite irrelevant to the heavens.

Samuel Chew remarks that Egdon itself is a manifestation of "that Power that moves the world, a Power which is not inimical (for hostility implies intention, and intention consciousness) but indifferent to man."[20] That fateful day Mrs. Yeobright goes to call at her son's home, she sees Clym in the distance cutting furze: "The silent being who thus occupied himself seemed to be of no more account in life than an insect. . . . He appeared of a russet hue, not more distinguishable from the scene around him than the green caterpillar from the leaf it feeds on."[21] Far from being the center of attention, man is reduced to no more consequence than an insect. Egdon, like the blind Doomsters in "Hap," does not have any special interest in man, for humans are swallowed up and indiscriminately absorbed into background along with lower forms of life. "Every scene of

The Return of the Native is overshadowed with the gloom, the loneliness, the savage permanence of the Heath, which has so obstinate a way of assimilating men to its likeness instead of yielding to their will and working."[22]

Just as Egdon Heath acts symbolically to represent a passive and indifferent Power, so it also metaphorically exemplifies man. "The vast tract of unenclosed wild known as Egdon Heath was at present a place perfectly accordant with man's nature--neither ghastly, hateful, nor ugly; neither commonplace, unmeaning nor tame; but, like man, slighted and enduring; and withal singularly colossal and mysterious in its swarthy monotony. As with some persons who have long lived apart, solitude seemed to look out of its countenance. It had a lonely face suggesting tragical possibilities."[23] Perhaps one reason Hardy begins both Tess and The Return of the Native with a solitary figure walking along a road is to emphasize man's isolation. As old Mr. Vye in the latter novel perceives another traveler in front of him, the following comment is made. "It was the single atom of life that the scene contained, and it only served to render the general loneliness more evident."[24]

Hardy dwells on this aspect of the human existence purposely. There must be no mistaking of a way out by divine intervention, and in at least one instance in Tess the bleakness seems awful. While at Flintcomb-Ash, which Marion describes as a starve-acre place, Tess sees a side of nature which mirrors the sense of abondonment she feels. The comment that follows occurs as Tess and Marion work grubbing swedes out of the ground. "Every leaf of the vegetable having already been consumed, the whole field was in colour a desolate drab; it was a complexion without features, as if a face, from chin to brow, should be only an expanse of skin. The sky wore, in another colour, the same likeness; a white vacuity of countenance with the

lineaments gone. So these two upper and nether visages confronted each other all day long . . . without anything standing between them but the two girls crawling over the surface of the former like flies."[25]

Hardy's characters do not by any means always recognize this indifference of heaven. Eustacia in her preparation to flee the Heath by running away with Wildeve is heard crying: "How I have tried to be a splendid woman, and how destiny has been against me . . . ! O, how hard it is of Heaven to devise such tortures for me, who have done no harm to Heaven at all!"[26] In this statement Eustacia is certainly blaming some Power with deliberate ill intent for her misfortunes. Tess early reasons that her family's difficulties have something to do with living on a blighted planet, and Hardy himself seems to fall into the same pitfall in the concluding paragraph of Tess when he says: "'Justice' was done, and the President of the Immortals in Aeschylean phrase had ended his sport with Tess." Because this sounds so much like an indictment of heaven, Lionel Johnson does not rate Tess as high as other of Hardy's novels. He maintains that Hardy was not content to let the facts speak for themselves in his attempt to justify the ways of man to God and resorted to inserting morals or epigrams.[27]

It would seem more likely, however, to assume that Hardy intends irony and is simply stating the reaction that most people would have on being faced with Tess's plight, that is that a malign God must be responsible.[28] It is only natural for men who have been defeated, in spite of their doing what they consider their best, to blame some one or thing. J. W. Beach describes this mental attitude as fatalism, the feeling that "what we do is necessitated by the nature of things or by the decree of some mysterious power over which we have no control."[29] In the light of the bulk of Hardy's prose and poetry, it seems likely that he was providing his characters as

well as his readers a rationalization. Another instance of intentional irony occurs when Frank Troy, having gathered up all his money and borrowed as much as possible from his wife, means to give belated aid to his former sweetheart, Fanny Robin. Thinking this a rather noble action, he is angry that Fanny does not keep their rendezvous. When he discovers she has died bearing his child, the ridiculous comment is made that "Fate had dealt grimly with him."[30]

In relation to The Return of the Native, M. A. Goldberg makes the statement that "there is no Heaven operating as a Force within the novel, no Jupiter hurling thunderbolts, not Pallas Athene intervening in the ways of man; and Hardy is remote from a seventeenth century Milton who can justify the ways of God."[31] Eustacia falsely assumes that Heaven is to blame for her misery just as the peasant Susan Nunsuch believes that Eustacia is the cause for her son Johnny's illness. "To counteract the malign spell which she imagined poor Eustacia to be working, the boy's mother busied herself with a ghastly invention of superstition, calculated to bring powerlessness, atrophy, and annihilation on any human being against whom it was directed."[32] Susan melts a wax effigy of Eustacia which she permeates with pins, all the time saying the Lord's Prayer backwards. This kind of folk magic is one way of using reasoning to explain ill luck since man can not easily accept an unwanted fate. Where Eustacia chose an abstraction, heaven, to rationalize her destiny, Susan determined a more immediate and understandable cause, a bewitched Eustacia.

Man by nature looks for some supernatural explanation for his suffering, yet Hardy clearly indicates the answer lies elsewhere. Almost without fail there are quite human causes for the predicaments of his main characters. Tess Derbyfield didn't just happen along at the Stoke-d'Urbervilles' door-

step. She was willfully sent by a father lacking in simple intelligence and by a both morally and physically lazy mother. Without so much as a query about their supposed relation, they sent their naive daughter, almost a child, to claim kin and hopefully land a husband. Whether there is any cure for people like the Derbyfields--welfare, education, sterilization, or whatever--is a debatable point, but the "flaw" in Tess's character because of the birth of Alec's child was imposed by humans, not gods. Her continued punishment will be discussed later.

Fate could easily be indicted when Gabriel loses his whole flock of sheep near the beginning of Far From the Madding Crowd. But Gabriel's reaction is much more honest. He promptly shoots the dog at fault, having known for some time that the animal could not distinguish "between doing a thing well enough and doing it too well."[33] He had allowed this threat to exist in full knowledge of the very possible consequences. Eustacia is really just as much the own cause of her unhappiness since she refuses to accept the reality of Egdon Heath and endeavor to study its meaning. She refuses to believe Clym that he intends to stay in his homeland, thinking as his wife she can change his mind. She, in short, has not gained a "homely zest" for doing what is possible to be done. The easy way out is to blame some supernatural power.

Another seemingly plausible explanation for bad fortune is the working of chance, accident, or coincidence. In fact Hardy has frequently been criticized for manipulating his plots so that convenient, or more likely inconvenient, incidents just happen. It is just by chance, for instance, that Mrs. Yeobright decides to call on Clym and Eustacia the very day that Wildeve pays a visit to their house. Clym, tired from a long day of furze cutting, sleeps while his wife and her would-be lover talk. Mrs. Yeobright

knocks at the door, and Eustacia, reluctant to see her mother-in-law anyway, figures the knocking will wake Clym. She is reassured when she hears Clym moving in the next room utter, "Mother," and makes no attempt to answer the door. The result of this episode in which no one is really at fault is that Mrs. Yeobright dies on her walk home, and Clym and Eustacia are permanently estranged. Is it stretching realism too much to expect the reader to accept chance as the cause of a death and the separation of husband and wife? Apparently it seems to have been a chance decision which prompted Robert Kennedy on a fatal June night to change his mind at the last moment and leave the Ambassador Hotel by the kitchen exit, thereby receiving an assassin's bullet. And who would say that it seems "realistic" that a murdered man would, the day before his death, have taken out a large double indemnity insurance policy on himself? Yet Herbert Clutter did. Accident is a part of every-day life, though perhaps Hardy does use it more than is realistically feasible. On artistic grounds, however, chance is perfectly acceptable because he is saying that this is the order of things.[34] It is simply not possible to explain all things in life, particularly those tinged with absurdity, and so Hardy ascribes chance and ironic mischance as the causes for the inscrutible and the incomprehensible. "Chance . . . is the incarnation of the blind forces controlling human destiny."[35]

From a slightly different point of view, one can explain the frequent use of chance by admitting its usefulness in telling a good story. Hardy was not simply interested in setting down his personal philosophy in his novels; he was essentially a story teller.[36] In July of 1881 the author jotted down the following note on fiction. "The real, if unavowed, purpose of fiction is to give pleasure by gratifying the love of the uncommon in human experience . . . . This is done all the more perfectly in proportion

as the reader is illuded to believe ther personages true and real like himself . . . . The writer's problem is, how to strike the balance between the uncommon and the ordinary so as on the one hand to give interest, on the other to give reality."[37] Chance is a reasonable way to effect an uncommon event.

In Hardy's works there is not much need to rely on the supernatural for macabre events since the natural can be sufficiently strange. How odd it is that the man responsible for Tess's fall from innocence should be converted to the Christianity that refused their baby a decent burial. How odd that the man directly responsible for Alec'c conversion is the father of Tess's husband and is also indirectly responsible for Angel's rejection of her, having thoroughly inculcated his son with a double-standard, hypocritical religion. It is an equally strange coincidence that Bathsheba's kind act of bringing her former servant's dead body to her home to lie in state should be the cause of her husband's desertion since, unknown to Bathsheba, Fanny Robin had been his lover and died bearing his child. "It is against the background of such strange and startling conjunctions of the homely and the strange, that Hardy takes the measure of human beings--of their seeming minuteness and occasional tragic dignity."[38]

An aspect of chance often forgotten, however, is that it need not always work against man. Each one can think of a time in his own life when a possible catastrophe or at least an inconvenience was averted because of a chance decision or happening. Hardy himself pointed this out in writing about "the survival of the fittest in the struggle for life. There is an altruism and coalescence between the cells as well as antagonism. Certain cells destroy certain cells; but others assist and combine."[39] The reason it is so difficult to think of an incident in Hardy's novels in which chance

worked to the advantage of all parties involved is no doubt that these circumstances are not nearly so interesting as when trouble is the issue.

At any rate Hardy accepts accident as a perfectly normal force in life, and there is not much that can be done to predict or avoid it. Yet many of the episodes occurring in his novels commonly said to result from the working of chance are rather the consequence of a lack of foresight. Clare does not know about Tess's past before their marriage because the letter she slipped under his door "happened" to slide under the carpet. But how thoughtless of her to leave any possibility to chance that he might not receive this important information, for she knows Clare well enough to predict his reaction. Even had it not been hidden from view, he might not have ever noticed it, or someone else might have picked it up. Still this action is in character for Tess, a confused unhappy young woman who longs for peace so desperately that at first she cannot confront her fiance with reality. When she writes to her mother for advice, she surely knows her mother's counsel will be to hide the truth. Perhaps "the extraordinary amount of lying and concealment in /Hardy's/ books responds to the human fact that everyone has something to conceal."[40]

Sergeant Troy is one character who has more than the average amount to hide, and Bathsheba is quite aware of it. Even so their marriage was not a chance occurrence as she might like to believe. Though she had gone to Bath with the firm resolve to break their engagement, was she "altogether blind to the obvious fact that the support of a lover's arms is not of a kind best calculated to assist a resolve to renounce him?"[41] Surely she learns to accept responsibility for her actions and to face reality by working closely with Gabriel Oak; he is one Hardyan protagonist who does not bewail what chance has done to him. It is purely an accident that he is in

the right place at the right time to lead the effort in extinguishing a straw-stack fire and thus keeping Miss Everdene's barn from burning, but it is not just by chance he knows a rain is coming later when Troy, his master, assures him of the contrary. Five wheat-ricks and three stacks of barley are uncovered meaning that a rain would destroy about seven hundred fifty pounds of income for Bathsheba. He is a man who knows nature's ways and by the way the sheep have bunched up he can be sure a thunderstorm is imminent and a cold continuous rain is certain to follow because of the activity of insects and small animals. He therefore proceeds to cover the grain. A man who uses his head can forestall many so-called chance happenings.

Roy Morrell has said that "many of Hardy's chances . . . are those that are bound to happen in time, within a confined community. If a thing does not happen today, or tomorrow, or the next day, Hardy's people seem to infer that it can never happen at all. This pattern is often misunderstood: critics complain that Hardy makes things happen in the way that is most awkward to all concerned, whereas what he is often doing is showing that if nothing is done to forestall an accident, or to control the way it happens, it is more and more likely, as time goes on, to happen in a way that is not convenient."[42] This view is substantiated by an April 1878 notebook entry of Hardy's. "A Plot . . . should arise from the gradual closing in of a situation that comes of ordinary human passions, prejudices, and ambitions, by reason of the characters taking no trouble to ward off the disastrous events produced by the said passions, prejudices, and ambitions."[43]

The point then of this whole discussion of chance is that 1) man must accept the fact that certain things happen in his life simply because of accident, that 2) foresight and reasonable behavior in the face of truth are

the best means of guarding against deleterious results of chance, and that 3) many happenings we blame on chance are in actuality natural occurrences and can be predicted. The first conclusion shows an unfortunate aspect Hardy sees in life, but the latter two contain melioristic elements that can help men live happier lives.

Certainly happiness is the most sought after goal among the inhabitants of Wessex. Hardy once marveled at man's determination to enjoy life, saying, "It is achieved, of a sort, under superhuman difficulties. Like pent-up water it will find a chink of possibility somewhere."[44] Frequently that "chink of possibility" is provided by love, which is one way of explaining why Hardy uses love so often as a major part of the plots of his novels. Love represents, as Lord David Cecil has noticed, "man's thirst for happiness."[45]

It is also a ready-made source for many good stories, a concern of the author's which has already been mentioned. In his preface to Jude the Obscure he says love is the "strongest passion known to humanity," and as such it can be counted on to produce a drama--irrespective of social and economic level--of far more interest than the humdrum of daily living. That love almost invariably leads to unhappiness, the opposite of what is being sought, seems to be a paradox. When Bathsheba Everdene considers her relationship with Sergeant Troy, she realizes that his infatuation for her will not be permanent. "She had penetrated Troy's nature so far as to estimate his tendencies pretty accurately, but unfortunately loved him no less in thinking that he might soon cease to love her--indeed, considerably more."[46] Yet why does she pursue him and agree to marriage? Jealousy and desire make her choice for her once he tells her "he had that day seen a woman more beautiful than I, and that his constancy could not be counted on

unless I at once became his . . . ."[47]

A character of Hardy's creation in love loses his ability to control his fate. In terms of sexual selection man does not seem very different from lower animals; generally two people are attracted for sexual reasons, and very little regard is paid to other factors. Of course, the most poignant example of this occurs in Jude the Obscure in which Jude, an extremely sensitive young man with aspirations of attending Christminster (Oxford), and a sensuously coarse and pretentious girl, Arabella, become lovers. Hardy sees fit to initiate this romance when Arabella, who is washing pigs' chitterlings with two other girls, throws a lump of offal at Jude as he passes them on the road. Certainly all pretenses of romantic love have been stripped from a relationship which begins with a smack of pig innerds in the ear! "The unvoiced call of woman to man, which was uttered very distinctly by Arabella's personality, held Jude to the spot against his intention--almost against his will, and in a way new to his experience."[48] Jude actually does not have freedom of the will in this situation; the feelings he has for Arabella are entirely unrelated to her as an individual because sexual selection, as Hardy interpreted it from Darwin, is accidental and indifferent.

This same point is cruelly made again with regard to three simple, lovelorn dairymaids, Marion, Retty, and Izz in Tess of the d'Urbervilles. They have just spent a day with Angel Clare, the man they mutually adore, and are beginning to recognize the futility of their infatuation. While trying to sleep, "they writhed feverishly under the oppressiveness of an emotion thrust on them by cruel Nature's law--an emotion which they had neither expected nor desired . . . . The differences which distinguished them as individuals were abstracted by this passion, and each was but por-

tion of one organism called sex."[49] There is little doubt that trouble is often the consequence of relationships which owe their inceptions to instinct alone.

Once again man must face the obvious fact that the world was not necessarily tailored to human measure. Philosophers of no less stature than Hegel have been deceived, according to Hardy, into starting from the wrong position: "They cannot get away from a prepossession that the world must somehow have been made to be a comfortable place for man."[50] If indeed there is a God (and Hardy doubts this, saying, "I have been looking for God fifty years, and I think that if he existed I should have discovered him"[51]), he is indifferent to men's lives. Chance plays a rather large role in life, just like sex, and man's odds for happiness with regard to both are fifty-fifty. These are facts that must be acknowledged, and once they are, some ways of amelioration can more than likely be discovered.

In a 1902 poem, "The Lacking Sense" Hardy presents a situation not unlike that of man's. A mother, because she is blind, often misdeals ills for blisses and wounds where she loves. The following is the advice Hardy offers to her creatures:

> Deal, then, her groping skill no scorn, no note of malediction...;
> And while she plods dead-reckoning on, in darkness of affliction,
> Assist her where thy creaturely dependence can or may . . . .

The child, and be extension man, has some real powers that should be used if possible. Surely the reason Hardy would have us look long and hard at the Worst is so that we will be able to ascertain what is and what is not possible to change, and it is not likely that Heaven will become anything but indifferent[52] or that chance will operate less or that the instinctive level can be excluded from love.

Society's cruel censorship of Tess is something that can and should

be altered. Most readers will readily admit that Tess does not deserve the unhappy life which is forced upon her because of her seduction by Alec d'Urberville. Hardy implies that Tess has inherited her mother's womanliness as well as her degraded ancestors' tendency of a slight incautiousness, but one cannot accept these as sufficient weaknesses to justify her fate. The real reason for her unhappiness is that society has conventionally labeled women who give birth to illegitimate babies "sinners," and consequently it is necessary that Tess, the offender against society, be punished. The novel is, however, the story of a "pure woman"; Tess herself is pure, but society has so impressed upon her and others that she has transgressed some immutable law that it is impossible for life to be anything than what it is. At times Tess is able to throw off the sense of guilt she feels. Reflecting on some pheasants which have been wounded and then abandoned by hunters, she becomes ashamed of herself for her gloom which, she sees by comparison with the dying birds', is "based on nothing more tangible than a sense of condemnation under an arbitrary law of society which had no foundation in Nature."[53]

The repurcussions of society's condemnation of the fallen woman are far reaching; even the Christian religion which is traditionally thought of as a source of peace for sinners turns Tess away. Thus the only baptism Tess's child may receive is that administered by herself in the presence of her young brothers and sisters. The Vicar after some hesitation nobly assures Tess that her baptism will serve as well as his at Judgment, but when it comes to the matter of a Christian burial, he must by conscience refuse. "I would willingly do so if only we two were concerned," he pleads, and so Tess is placed in the pitiful situation of burying her dead child after dark in the shabby corner of the churchyard "where all unbap-

tized infants, notorious drunkards, suicides, and others of the conjecturally damned were laid."[54]

It is precisely because of the Church's intolerance and hypocrisy that Angel Clare had decided not to be ordained; yet when Clare is himself faced with a matter which would seem to require no more than a speck of humanity to understand, he is incapable of sympathy. D. H. Lawrence points out that "it is not Angel Clare's fault that he cannot come to Tess when he finds that she has in his words, been defiled. It is the result of generations of ultra-Christian training . . . ."[55] That he has unreasonably set up for himself society's double standard does not concern him. He has fallen in love with an abstraction--"a new-sprung child of nature" he calls Tess--and at the discovery that she is really only human, subject to all the inequalities and mishappenings of life, he must revert back to his early training. The sleepwalking scene proves that his subconscious is struggling with his conscious self to recognize Tess as his wife and to grant her the forgiveness she so desperately needs; but with the light of day comes the return of his reason, and that demands their separation. Hardy offers no excuse for a religion in which adherence to dogma causes hypocrisy and a perversion of character. Had it not been for its treatment of her, it seems probable that Tesswould have learned to use better judgment because of her seduction; as it is, she learns nothing except that mankind is at times maliciously cruel.

Lionel Johnson makes an interesting observation with regard to Clare's reversion to the bigotry of conventional morality. "The old we are meant to feel was wrong, and the new was right; but the inhuman irony of fate turned all to misunderstanding and despair: the new devil quoted the new scriptures in the ears of the new believers, and they went to the old des-

truction."[56] He somewhat hopelessly asks what good comes from man's discovering the better way if provoked by imperfections, he falls back into the old confusions.[57] He seems to forget that Clare does eventually come to repudiate his judgment against Tess. During his years in Brazil, he has time to reconsider in order to see things in a better perspective. "The beauty or ugliness of a character lay not only in its achievements, but in its aims and impulses; its true history lay, not only in things done, but among things willed."[58] For him the moral code is discredited, and he is able to see his wife for what she is--but the pity is, it is too late.

So many of man's problems are brought upon himself because individuals are too inhibited--from timidity, blindness, pride, or whatever--to show compassion towards others, especially those who are closest and therefore most important, before it is too late. Hardy once remarked, "How strange it is that we should talk so glibly of 'this cold world which shows no sympathy,' when this is the feeling of so many components of the same world--probably a majority--and nearly everyone's neighbour is waiting to give and receive sympathy."[59] Thus the last walk Mrs. Yeobright took was to her son's home to settle differences, to forgive, and to make friends with both Eustacia and Clym. Not being admitted, she leaves, only to have her son find her dying a few minutes later on his way to visit her and to make amends also. Both have good intentions, but they wait too long to make them known. The same could be said of Eustacia and Clym. Mrs. Yeobright's death had driven them apart, yet both regret their separation. Eustacia hopes for some sign of forgiveness from him, and Clym acts, writing her a letter offering understanding. But the importance of this gesture is thoughtlessly underestimated, and the letter is given to Timothy Fairway for delivery. He forgets it until late in the evening, and Cap-

tain Vye is then hesitant to wake Eustacia, little knowing this is the very night she and Wildeve have chosen to run away. Compassion too late and too carelessly offered results in another death and immense suffering for Clym.

It is clear that if men are to attain happiness--the equivalent of survival in Darwinian thought--they must be resourceful and they must take advantage of any opportunities offered them, particularly second chances. Thus Clym, though his ideals for progress among the peasants are laudable, in practical human terms fails, not once but twice. Tess is another of Hardy's characters who fatally refuses to act when the time is ripe. Clare had indeed falsely forsaken her, but it was within her power to reclaim him. After enduring a harsh existence at Flintcomb-Ash and hearing nothing from her husband, she determines to find out word of Clare by means of his parents. It is a courageous undertaking on her part to walk the thirty mile round trip and to confront Mr. and Mrs. Clare, but she never sees them. She is affronted by overheard remarks made by Angel's brothers about herself, "and she went her way without knowing that the greatest misfortune of her life was this feminine loss of courage at the last and critical moment through her estimating her father-in-law by his sons. Her present condition was precisely one which would have enlisted the sympathies of old Mr. and Mrs. Clare."[60]

Though Hardy's protagonists frequently fail to take advantage of opportunities to right past mistakes, he is careful always to give them a chance. Frank Troy comes to mind again as a man who, regardless of the number of possibilities given for right, sensible action, invariably does something stupid. Instead of rendering immediate aid to Fanny Robin once he discovers her precarious state of health, he makes an appointment to meet

her later. Once she is dead, instead of caring for and comforting the woman who is in fact his wife, he runs off, spends all his money to buy a tombstone, and then plants flowers on Fanny's grave which are promptly washed out in a rain storm by a torrent of water pouring forth from the mouth of a gurgoyle situated on the church tower. Through all this it is remarkable he "had no perception that in the futility of these romantic doings, dictated by a remorseful reaction from previous indifference, there was any element of absurdity."[61] The business of having the gurgoyle turned and replanting the flowers is left to one who learns from mistakes, his wife.

So often positive action is possible only if good intentions are accompanied by an eye not blind to reality. When Gabriel Oak attempts to save Bathsheba's grain from a drenching, he is not so foolhardy as to just hope he will be safe from lightning. He protects himself by improvising a lightning conductor from a long tethering chain. Yet Gabriel is an exception. Most people become so wrapped up in their romantic notions of the way things ought to be, they cannot perceive even the obvious. Eustacia loves Clym but admits part of her love is her baseless notion he will forsake his desire to stay on the Heath and take her away. Farmer Boldwood relentlessly pursues Bathsheba, ignoring the fact she does not so much as mildly care for him. Angel foolishly idealizes Tess and overlooks her considerable number of redeeming qualities. He fails to realize what Hardy recognizes: "It is the incompleteness that is loved, when love is sterling and true. This is what differentiates the real one from the imaginary, the practicable from the impossible, the Love who returns the kiss of the Vision that melts away. A man sees the Diana or the Venus in his Beloved, but what he loves is the difference."[62]

To find happiness and then to retain it are not impossibilities in Hardy's estimation, but they do require more effort and clearsightedness than many persons are willing to expend. Surely as an evolutionary meliorist, the author took several of the precepts present in his novels from the ever evolving natural world. Roy Morrell has summarized the most basic of these in the following manner: "Nature seems to use an inexhaustible variety of survival tactics" including disguise, "vigilence, speed, skill in dodging, or energy and endurance when pursued . . . . There is none of the taking of unnecessary risks, the assumption that luck or Providence will be on one's side . . . , and where there is much at stake extra precautions are taken." Finally the evolutionist recognizes "there is an intimate connection between Time and Chance."[63] Realizing the importance of each of these tenets allows for the survival of life and the happiness of humans.

But by creating so many characters who fail to accept and enjoy life, has not Hardy thrown some doubt on the viability of his belief that things will eventually improve? Of all the characters--and Hardy maintains that they, "however they may differ, express mainly the author, his largeness of heart or otherwise, his culture, /and/ his insight"[64]--only one considered here, Gabriel Oak, has much success in attaining his ultimate goal. Yet how credible a character is he? His patience and endurance are commendable, but they do not particularly endear him to the reader. In fact one wonders if much of the misery involving Fanny, Troy, Boldwood, and Bathsheba might not have been avoided had he asserted himself more forcibly. Hardy's "ideal character is clear enough--that of a faithful and generous extrovert who is also a 'passionate lover of the old-fashioned sort,' who knows when to sacrifice his own claims but also when to

advance them, who does not stand shyly against the active current of love."[65] Yet one can agree with Guerard that Hardy found it almost impossible to dramatize such a person.

His personal sympathies lie with the man who has good intentions which are thwarted by chance and a love affair; his spontaneous compassion for men unable to cope with their lot is naturally translated into novels that tell good stories. Philosophically we may think Clym Yeobright to be too quiet and pliable a man to justify a title, but Hardy could say of him: "I got to like the character of Clym before I had done with him. I think he is the nicest of all my heroes, and not a bit like me."[66] Hardy, as a thinker, is much more sensible than Clym, and he surely recognizes that though Clym may be likeable and though we may pity him, still he is guilty of not ordering circumstances to his best advantage.

This then is the essence of Hardy's so-called pessimism: "My motto is, first correctly diagnose the complaint--in this case human ills--and ascertain the cause; then set about finding a remedy if one exists. The motto or practice of the optimist is: Blind the eyes to the real malady, and use empirical panaceas to suppress the symptoms."[67] Because the pessimist has a greater chance of ultimately being successful, Hardy was quite right in a conversation with William Archer to say of himself: "My practical philosophy is distinctly meliorist . . . . Whatever may be the inherent good or evil of life, it is certain that men make it much worse than it need be. When we have got rid of a thousand remediable ills, it will be time enough to determine whether the ill that is irremediable outweighs the good." To the question, "And you think that we are getting rid of the remediable ills?" Hardy replied, "Slowly but surely--yes."[68]

NOTES

[1]Florence Emily Hardy, The Life of Thomas Hardy (New York, 1962), p. 313.
[2]Life, p. 205.
[3]Life, p. 20.
[4]G. D. Klingopulos, "Hardy's Tales Ancient and Modern," From Dickens to Hardy, in The Pelican Guide to English Literature, ed. Boris Ford (Baltimore, 1964), VI, p. 407.
[5]Life, p. 444.
[6]Life, pp. 23-24.
[7]Albert J. Guerard, Thomas Hardy: The Novels and Stories (Cambridge, 1949), p. 19.
[8]Joseph Warren Beach, The Technique of Thomas Hardy (New York, 1962), p. 68.
[9]Guerard, p. 20.
[10]Samuel Chew, "Introduction," The Mayor of Casterbridge, Thomas Hardy (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), p. x.
[11]Lord David Cecil, Hardy the Novelist (London, 1942), p. 193.
[12]D. H. Lawrence, "Hardy's 'Predilection d'Artiste,'" Hardy: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Albert Guerard (Englewood Cliffs, 1963), p. 47.
[13]Thomas Hardy, The Return of the Native (New York, 1962), I, ch. 7.
[14]Native, III, ch. 1.
[15]Hardy, Tess of the d'Urbervilles (New York,1951), ch. XVIII.
[16]Tess, ch. XXXVI.
[17]Tess, ch. IV.
[18]Harvey Curtis Webster, On a Darkling Plain (Chicago, 1947), p. 42.
[19]Native, I, ch. 7.
[20]Chew, Thomas Hardy, Poet and Novelist (New York, 1928), p. 40.
[21]Native, IV, ch. 5.
[22]Beach, p. 99.
[23]Native, I, ch. 1.
[24]Native, I, ch. 2.
[25]Tess, ch. XLIII.
[26]Native, V, ch. 7.
[27]Lionel Johnson, The Art of Thomas Hardy (London, 1923), p. 217. Cecil sees the novel as an "indictment of Providence--a parable whose moral is that it is not possible to justify God's ways to men." p. 132.
[28]Webster, p. 174.
[29]Beach, p. 228.
[30]Hardy, Far From the Madding Crowd (New York, 1967), ch. XLV.
[31]M. A. Goldberg, "Hardy's Double-Visioned Universe," Essays in Criticism, VII (October, 1957), 382.
[32]Native, V, ch. 7.
[33]Madding Crowd, ch. V.
[34]Dorothy Van Ghent, "On Tess of the d'Urbervilles," The English Novel: Form and Function (New York, 1953), p. 205.
[35]Cecil, p. 128.
[36]Life, p. 100. In fact his breezy lack of artistic concern in his early career is surprising. The following note was made early in the year of 1874. "The truth is that I am willing, and indeed anxious, to give up any points which may be desirable in a story when read as a whole, for the sake of others which shall please those who read it in numbers. Perhaps I may have higher aims some day, and be a great stickler for the proper artistic balance

of the complete work, but for the present circumstances lead me to wish merely to be considered a good hand at a serial."

[37] Life, p. 150.
[38] Guerard, p. 99.
[39] Life, p. 259.
[40] Guerard, p. 85.
[41] Madding Crowd, ch. XXXII.
[42] Roy Morrell, Thomas Hardy: The Will and the Way (Kuala Lumpur, 1965) p. 49.
[43] Life, p. 120.
[44] Life, p. 213.
[45] Cecil, p. 31.
[46] Madding Crowd, ch. XXXII.
[47] Madding Crowd, ch. XXXVII.
[48] Hardy, Jude the Obscure (New York, 1923), I, ch. 6.
[49] Tess, ch. XXIII.
[50] Life, p. 179.
[51] Life, p. 224.
[52] J. O. Bailey's chapter, "Hardy's Evolutionary Meliorism," Thomas Hardy and the Cosmic Mind (Chapel Hill, 1956), pp. 152-186, suggests the interpretation of the Dynasts that man even has it within his power gradually to make the Unconscious aware of earth's situation, and, then as a result of this awareness, to awaken its compassion. The following speech of the Spirit of the Pities in the After Scene supports him: "Men gained cognition with the flux of time,/ And wherefore not the Force informing them. . . ?" The novels, however, do not indicate this.
[53] Tess, ch. XLI. Johnson, pp. 230-233, points out Hardy's inconsistent use of nature; now she is cruel which is a reproach to divine justice, now she is kindly whereas society is harsh. He feels there is a need for a definition of the word--is it a "Conscious Power" or a convenient name for the whole mass of physical laws? Chew, pp. 106-107, also notes the multiple use of nature.
[54] Tess, ch. XIV.
[55] D. H. Lawrence, "Study of Thomas Hardy," Phoenix (New York, 1936), p. 485.
[56] Johnson, p. 176.
[57] Johnson, p. 241.
[58] Tess, ch. XLIX.
[59] Life, p. 253.
[60] Tess, ch. XLIV.
[61] Madding Crowd, ch. XLV.
[62] Life, p. 239.
[63] Morrell, p. 95.
[64] Hardy, "The Profitable Reading of Fiction," Life and Art, ed. Ernest Brennecke (New York, 1925), pp. 72-73.
[65] Guerard, p. 119.
[66] Life, pp. 357-358.
[67] Life, p. 383.
[68] William Archer, "Real Conversations, Conversation 1--With Mr. Thomas Hardy," The Critic, XXXVIII (April, 1901), 316, quoted by Bailey, Cosmic Mind, p. 181.

LIST OF WORKS CITED

Bailey, J. O. Thomas Hardy and the Cosmic Mind. Chapel Hill, 1956.

Beach, Joseph Warren. The Technique of Thomas Hardy. New York, 1962.

Beebe, Maurice, Bonnie Culotta, and Erin Marcus. "Criticism of Thomas Hardy: A Selected Check-List." Modern Fiction Studies, V (Autumn 1960), 258-279.

Cecil, Lord David. Hardy the Novelist. London, 1942.

Chew, Samuel C. Thomas Hardy, Poet and Novelist. New York, 1928.

Goldberg, M. A. "Hardy's Double-Visioned Universe." Essays in Criticism, Vii (October 1957), 374-382.

Guerard, Albert F. Hardy: A Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood Cliffs, 1963.

_____. Thomas Hardy: The Novels and the Stories. Cambridge, 1949.

Hardy, Florence Emily. The Life of Thomas Hardy. New York, 1962.

Hardy, Thomas. Far From the Madding Crowd. New York, 1967.

_____. Jude the Obscure. New York, 1923.

_____. Life and Art, ed. Ernest Brennecke, Jr. New York, 1925.

_____. The Mayor of Casterbridge. New York, 1950.

_____. The Return of the Native. New York, 1962.

_____. Tess of the d'Urbervilles. New York, 1951.

Johnson, Lionel. The Art of Thomas Hardy. London, 1923.

Klingopulos, G. D. "Hardy's Tales Ancient and Modern." From Dickens to Hardy. in The Pelican Guide to English Literature, ed. Boris Ford, VI. Baltimore, 1964.

Lawrence, D. H. "Study of Thomas Hardy." Phoenix. New York, 1936.

Morrell, Roy. Thomas Hardy: The Will and the Way. Kuala Lumpar, Malaya, 1965.

Stevenson, Lionel. "Thomas Hardy." Victorian Fiction. Cambridge, 1964, pp. 349-387.

Van Ghent, Dorothy. "On Tess of the d'Urbervilles." The English Novel: Form and Function. New York, 1953.

Webster, Harvey Curtis. On a Darkling Plain. Chicago, 1947.

MELIORISM IN THOMAS HARDY'S NOVELS

by

CONNIE STERLING STAMETS

B. A., Kansas State University, 1966

AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1968

Meliorism in Thomas Hardy's Novels

In almost any sampling of the fiction works of Thomas Hardy, one finds the repeated use of similar plot elements: disturbed main characters who are frequently placed in grotesque and impossible predicaments, the extensive role of chance and coincidence in the ordering of human affairs, the background of an indifferent universe, and a preponderance of bad luck and improbability. For the most part Hardy's protagonists are not happy, and often this state of mind is the result of an unwise marriage. It is not surprising then that critics and popular opinion have traditionally labeled Hardy a pessimist concerning the human condition.

Yet to say he is a pessimist does not accurately describe his way of thinking. His attitude, neatly summarized in "In Tenebris II," is that "If way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst." His conclusion about man is that the better life may be found only after a careful and unpretentious scrutiny of reality. Man should prepare himself for the worst and expect happiness only if his demands on life are modest. In this way, as Hardy is reported to have said, man is playing the sure game and need never be disappointed.

His novels, however, reveal that few men live out their lives satisfied with what they have been offered and have gained. Indeed, there are many things about life which cannot be changed. If there are gods controlling men's lives, they are indifferent, blind gods. Chance is a fact of life which must be accepted, and natural selection in terms of sex may well work to man's disadvantage. But often individual men and the society they are part of add needless pain and suffering. And this situation Hardy, as an evolutionary meliorist, believes can be changed. By their own action, men

can improve their lives and life itself; they have it within their power to be happier. Characteristically this optimism is restrained since by the adjective "evolutionary" it is to be understood Hardy believes this progress will come slowly, one minute stage at a time, corresponding to the processes of adaptation of biological evolution.

This study considers the worst that Hardy sees for the characters who live in his novels and analyzes the actions and environments of those who do and do not share the author's simple pragmatic approach to life. It is possible to discern a strain of meliorism working through Hardy's novels by referring primarily to Far From the Madding Crowd, The Return of the Native, and Tess of the d'Urbervilles.